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Why Did Aethelstan Matter in Tenth-Century Continental Affairs?

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Part II
Kingship, Royal Models, and Dynastic Strategies

‘THE KING FROM OVERSEAS’: WHY DID ÆTHELSTAN MATTER IN TENTH-CENTURY CONTINENTAL AFFAIRS?

Veronica Ortenberg

According to the tenth-century chronicler Flodoard, Æthelstan, king of Wessex (924–39), was ‘the king from overseas’.¹ In the early twelfth century William of Malmesbury wrote of him:

This explains why the whole of Europe sang his praises and extolled his merits to the sky; kings of other nations, not without reason, thought themselves fortunate if they could buy his friendship either by family alliances or by gifts.²

Was this a case of William of Malmesbury’s hyperbole? How far did it correspond with the reality of Æthelstan’s reign, the perception of him by his contemporaries, and his own perception of his role in Continental politics?

Æthelstan’s Carolingian heritage had its origins in the mid-ninth century. The story of Æthelwulf’s marriage in 856 to Judith, Charles the Bald’s daughter, and its implications, notably in terms of Judith’s anointing and coronation in West Francia prior to her arrival in England, with an English coronation *ordo* adapted by Hincmar, are familiar.³ A great deal has been made, justifiably, of the impact of

¹ ‘Alstanus rex [...] a transmarinis regionibus’: *Flodoard* (Lauer), p. 63 (*s.a.* 936); subsequent references will be both to this edition, and to *Flodoard* (Fanning-Bachrach).

² ‘Propter hæc tota Europa laudes eius predicabat, uirtutem in cælum ferebat: felices se reges alienigenæ non falso putabant si uel affinitate uel muneribus eius amicitias mercarentur’; Malmesbury, *GRA*, I, 215–16.

³ *The Annals of St Bertin*, trans. by Janet L. Nelson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 83, 86, and 97; *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp. 69–71 and 73; Janet L. Nelson, ‘The Earliest English *Ordo*: Some Liturgical and Historical

Judith's charisma on that account, and the way in which the West Saxon kings used this first link with the Carolingian dynasty, especially Æthelwulf's son Æthelbald, who was so aware of it that, rather than lose it on his father's death, he married his widowed stepmother himself in the teeth of ecclesiastical opposition.⁴ Judith was anything but just a symbolically important figure: she was given land in England as her dower (which she later relinquished), witnessed charters with Æthelwulf, and sat next to him on the throne.

But Judith, apart from her probable entourage of Franks and her own impact as a learned Carolingian royal, was also very likely to have been closely involved with Alfred, the future King of Wessex. As an older teenager, she was closer in age to Alfred, then a young teenager, by the time she left England after her second husband's death in 860, than to either of her husbands. And Alfred had been to West Francia and stayed at court there. It would be surprising if, equipped with the knowledge of Carolingian rule derived from his visits to Charles the Bald's court, his father's attempts at imitating that court, including his use of a Frankish secretary,⁵ and the presence of Judith at his father's and then brother's court, Alfred had not seen, understood, and wanted to use the Carolingian model of kingship. We know indeed to what extent he did so, for example through his deliberately created parallels with Charlemagne's biography by Einhard and those of Louis the Pious by Thegan and the Astronomer, in his own official biography by Asser, and also in the way in which he deliberately continued the kinship with the Carolingians through the marriage of his daughter Æthelthryth to Baldwin II, the son of Judith and of the Count of Flanders Baldwin I.⁶ Their sons and Æthelstan's cousins,

Aspects', in *Authority and Power: Studies in Medieval Law and Government Presented to Walter Ullmann*, ed. by B. Tierney and P. Lineham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 29–48, repr. in Nelson, *PREME*, pp. 341–60 (pp. 351–53); see also Pauline Stafford, 'Charles the Bald, Judith and England', in *Charles the Bald: Court and Kingdom*, ed. by Margaret Gibson, Janet L. Nelson, and David Ganz, 2nd edn (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), pp. 139–53; and M. J. Enright, 'Charles the Bald and Æthelwulf of Wessex: The Alliance of 856 and Strategies of Royal Succession', *Journal of Medieval History*, 5 (1979), 291–302.

⁴ Enright, 'Charles the Bald', p. 297; Stafford, 'Charles the Bald', pp. 144–47 and 151–52.

⁵ *The Letters of Lupus of Ferrières*, ed. and trans. by G. W. Regenos (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 104 (no. 85); Stafford, 'Charles the Bald', p. 140 and n. 8.

⁶ Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 218–19; on this, see Philip Grierson, 'The Relations between England and Flanders before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 4th ser., 23 (1941), 71–112 (pp. 85–88); and S. M. Sharp, 'England, Europe and the Celtic World: King Æthelstan's Foreign Policy', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 79 (1997), 197–220 (pp. 202–06).

Arnulf and Adelolf (a Continental Germanic form of Æthelwulf), had names which reflected a whole ideological programme: Adelolf was named after his English grandfather Æthelwulf, while the elder, Arnulf, was given the name of the founding figure of the Carolingian dynasty. Finally, Alfred's use of Carolingian symbolism, which he had been introduced to when he had been consecrated in some way by the pope in Rome when a child of between four and six years old, a ceremony which he subsequently made Asser in his biography associate as closely as he could with Charlemagne's anointing at a similarly young age in 754 by the then pope under the aegis of his father Pippin, was taken up one step further when Alfred chose to replicate it through investing his grandson Æthelstan, at that same age, with a scarlet cloak, a belt with jewels, and a sword with a golden scabbard.⁷

Moreover, Alfred, himself a particularly learned king, obviously brought up his son Edward to think of kingship in association with learning, which Edward, if mostly a soldier-king himself, at least acted on in the education of all his daughters⁸ (a very important point for later events), and ultimately in that of Æthelstan himself, brought up by another strong woman, Æthelflæd, at the Mercian court — which I still believe to have happened despite Dumville's determination to prove that William of Malmesbury was unreliable.⁹ Pauline Stafford has made a good point about the somewhat different approach towards women in power, that is, queens, in Mercia on the one hand, where they were happily acknowledged as effective rulers, as Æthelstan's cousin the daughter of Æthelflæd was, and in Wessex on the other, where they were still in the background.¹⁰ Æthelstan, brought up in Mercia and possibly becoming king in opposition to the Wessex Establishment, would have been much more used to the idea of such forceful governing women.

⁷ 'Clausula de unctione Pippini', trans. in P. E. Dutton, *Carolingian Civilization: A Reader* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1993), p. 12; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 210–11.

⁸ Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 200–01.

⁹ Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 210–11; D. N. Dumville, 'Between Alfred the Great and Edgar the Peacemaker: Æthelstan, First King of the English', in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), pp. 141–71 (p. 146); against which, see Michael Wood, 'The Making of King Æthelstan's Empire: An English Charlemagne?', in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace Hadrill*, ed. by P. Wormald, D. Bullough, and R. Collins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), pp. 250–72 (pp. 265–66).

¹⁰ Stafford, 'Charles the Bald', pp. 147–49; Pauline Stafford, 'The King's Wife in Wessex, 800–1066', *PP*, 91 (1981), 3–27; and Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Batsford Academic and Educational, 1983); see also J. L. Nelson, 'A King Across the Sea: Alfred in Continental Perspective', *TRHS*, 5th ser., 36 (1986), 45–68.

The Carolingian ideological model had obviously been well understood by at least two of his half-sisters, Eadgifu and Edith, which turned out to be essential for them later on.¹¹

The soil of Carolingian association was thus already a rich and fertile one by the time Æthelstan became king. Its manifestations in his reign are well known. First, we have his acknowledged personal learning (whichever text one follows, William of Malmesbury's claimed tenth-century source or John the West Saxon's account)¹² and keenness to bring together a learned court on the model of Alfred's, itself modelled on Charles the Bald's. Next comes his coronation with anointment, which he presumably had performed to enhance as much as possible the parallel between his own rule and Carolingian traditions. It was all the more important to do so since, like Charlemagne, Æthelstan had also been born to his father before the latter became king.¹³ Æthelstan's titulature in charters and in his coinage from at least 931 and possibly earlier, 'rex totius Britanniae' at its most restrained, 'regnum totius Albionis auctore dispensans' or 'rex Anglorum, per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Britanniae regni solo sublimatus', with its insistence on the *imperium*, the rule over the whole of Britain and its other princes, becomes, significantly, more and more unified in a consistent formulation of titles, revealing the existence of the nucleus of a royal chancery around the king.¹⁴

Æthelstan's impetus for the holding of national unifying councils and his large body of legislation, which would have brought together personnel from all the separate sub-kingdoms of his realm,¹⁵ had two purposes. One was to provide for the order and social regulations of relations throughout his domain, in the way that Carolingian councils and capitularies had done, even as far as to firm up the administrative structure of shires and sheriffs, comparable to that of counts and counties. The second purpose was to highlight the unity of *Brittania* (*monarchia totius*

¹¹ See below, pp. 00–00.

¹² Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 210–13; Michael Lapidge, 'Some Latin Poems as Evidence for the Reign of Æthelstan', *ASE*, 9 (1981), 72–98.

¹³ Michael Wood, 'Æthelstan', in *In Search of the Dark Ages*, rev. edn (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 2001), pp. 127 and 131–33.

¹⁴ C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Æthelstan, King of England, 924–39', *British Numismatic Journal*, 42 (1974), 35–158 (pp. 55–56); Wood, 'The Making', pp. 253–59; Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 149–50 and 153–54.

¹⁵ Frank Merry Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, Oxford History of England, 2, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 352–54; Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 147–48, 151–54, 169–70; Wormald, *MEL*, pp. 290–308; Wood, 'Æthelstan', pp. 137–39.

Brittania), notably in Northumbria, where he used, in manuscripts such as CCCC, MS 183, all the influence and power of Bede to remind everyone of the golden age and unity of the original Anglo-Saxon people.¹⁶ Æthelstan's grants of bookland throughout the whole of his kingdom were intended to support this drive for unity, but, above all, the most effective and centralizing of his policies in that respect was his reform of the mints and his tight control over them and the coinage.¹⁷ Coins, for the first time, show the king wearing a crown (not a helmet or diadem), at first in London and Mercia, but gradually extending over most of Britain,¹⁸ and this was all part and parcel of the widespread campaign of dissemination of the King's royal image as the coins passed from hand to hand, abroad as well as in England. The iconography is entirely similar to Æthelstan's portrait in CCCC, MS 183 (Figure 27), a portrait which has clear parallels with those of Charles the Bald and Lothar in the Carolingian dedication scenes of several manuscripts.¹⁹

Æthelstan's ideology is entirely consistent with the image, not only of Carolingian kings, but also emperors, indeed in his styling in a manuscript inscription as 'basileus et curagulus', with the titles of the Byzantine emperor.²⁰ And this was not just wishful thinking on his part: the perception of Æthelstan as emperor by his neighbours can be seen, for example, from King Harald of Norway's gift to him of a sumptuous Viking ship with a purple sail (the imperial colour).²¹ Michael Wood coined the phrase 'an English Charlemagne' for Æthelstan, the king later called by William of Malmesbury 'Aethelstanus Magnus', and I could not agree more in

¹⁶ Simon Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', in *LLASE*, pp. 143–201 (pp. 180–81); David Rollason, 'St Cuthbert and Wessex: The Evidence of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS. 183', pp. 413–24, and L. Simpson, 'The King Æthelstan/St Cuthbert Episode in the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*: Its Significance for Mid-Tenth-Century English History', pp. 397–411, both in *St Cuthbert, his Cult and his Community to AD 1200*, ed. by G. Bonner, D. Rollason, and C. Stancliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989).

¹⁷ Wood, 'Æthelstan', pp. 138–39; Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 151–54.

¹⁸ Blunt, 'Coinage of Athelstan', pp. 47–48, 55–56, 62, and 115.

¹⁹ Wood, 'The Making', pp. 268–69; Rollason, 'St Cuthbert', pp. 420–21; Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', pp. 149 and 174.

²⁰ These occur in BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A II, a gospel-book of the late ninth or early tenth century, possibly produced at Lobbes in Germany and probably given to Æthelstan by Otto I during one of his embassies. When Æthelstan later offered this book to Christ Church Canterbury, an inscription was added: 'Aedelstan Anglorum basyleos et curagulus totius Bryttaniae [gave this manuscript]'; Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', pp. 147–53 (p. 149).

²¹ Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 216–17.

Center Figure 27 on this page.

Figure 27. King Æthelstan and St Cuthbert. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 183, fol. 1^v. Reproduced with permission.

terms of his description of the cultural and ideological connections which make Æthelstan so.²²

What I would like to propose in this paper is that, over and above these connections, Æthelstan, through his numerous family links, both was perceived by Continental rulers as and up to a point perceived himself to be a Carolingian. Since I shall argue that this informs much of his policy, we need to look in detail at the way in which these family connections brought him into the family and political networks of West Francia, Flanders, and Germany. I shall leave aside here, for lack of space, the Breton connections, which have already been well discussed by others.²³

The Carolingian connections of English kings, from those of Charlemagne and Offa to those of Alfred and his contemporaries on the Continent, have been previously discussed.²⁴ If one looks first at the marriage of Edward the Elder's daughter Eadgifu with Charles the Simple,²⁵ which was the first strand in the Æthelstan 'network' since Eadgifu was Æthelstan's half-sister, one may well be thinking that one understands why the King of Wessex might have wanted to give his daughter in marriage to the Carolingian King of West Francia, but wonder why it was that the latter and his family should have chosen an English princess. Traditionally the answer has often been that there was a common interest and anti-Viking policies on both sides of the Channel at a time when both kingdoms were repeatedly under attack. This is no doubt plausible, especially if looked at in the light of the difficulty of ensuring that military success in one kingdom would not produce an immediate Viking attack on the other, whichever was perceived as the weakest at that moment.²⁶ Another answer, and one much more likely to be correct, would be the continuously rising prestige of the English kings through Offa, Ecgberht, and Alfred, and the advantages of an alliance with the West Saxon royal family, by then the oldest royal line (*stirps regia*) in Europe, at least in terms of the way it

²² Wood, 'Æthelstan', pp. 136–39, and 'The Making', pp. 250–72.

²³ Caroline Brett, 'A Breton Pilgrim in England in the Reign of King Æthelstan: A Letter in British Library MS. Cotton Tiberius A.xv', in *France and the British Isles in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Essays by Members of Girton College, Cambridge in Memory of Ruth Morgan*, ed. by G. Jondorf and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), pp. 43–70; Sharp, 'England, Europe', pp. 199–202.

²⁴ In, for example, Nelson, 'King across the Sea'; see also Joanna E. Storey, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750–870* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

²⁵ Flodoard (*s.a.* 926); Æthelweard, *Chronicle* p. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 198–99.

²⁶ Enright, 'Charles the Bald', pp. 291–93.

repeatedly highlighted its own ancestry (Asser is an example of this). What had been hitherto too uneven a match, which was why Charlemagne had not accepted Offa's request for the hand of one of his daughters for his son, had become entirely acceptable in terms of the worthiness of the Wessex dynasty by the time of Edward: it was the Wessex family which had risen in prestige, while the Carolingians had become less powerful. This was all the more the case because, since Æthelwulf, the West Saxon dynasty had intermarried repeatedly with the Carolingians, through Judith's two English marriages and subsequently through that of Alfred's daughter with Judith's son, so that the two families were already kin. The choice of bride for Charles the Simple (already married and having produced several daughters but no son with his soon-to-be-repudiated queen Frederuna) was becoming limited. There were few women of sufficiently high status with Carolingian blood, who were not already associated with rival relationships (*parentelae*). The East Frankish kings were members of a new dynasty, the Liudolfings, which had emerged after the last Carolingian ruler of East Francia, Louis the Child, had died childless in 911. Any other marriageable women of suitable status from the houses of Vermandois, Burgundy, the Robertians, and so on had the drawback that they were members of the very families of the great magnates that Charles was trying to control, and would have thus obtained a considerable advantage in their own eyes and in that of their rivals through marriage with a Carolingian king. Such an outcome was clearly to be avoided for the Carolingians. It may seem obvious therefore that the best option was a royal princess from the well-respected, powerful, and kingworthy (through its Germanic descent and previous Carolingian alliances) family of Wessex. The alliance would bring reflected glory on Charles, be understood even by Frankish magnates as being superior to that with another aristocratic family from West Francia, and would not allow any of these families access to the Carolingian bloodline. A clever strategy which kept all the aces in Charles's hands!

Through this marriage, Æthelstan, who was already related to the Carolingians through his cousin, Arnulf, count of Flanders,²⁷ became even more closely enmeshed in the Carolingian network of kinship. In terms of Continental politics, the marriage of Eadgifu made him also related to the family of Heribert of Vermandois, which was one of the two main rising powers in West Francia in the first half of the tenth century, and which also claimed Carolingian descent from Charlemagne via his son Pippin, king of Italy, and then through his son, Bernard of Italy.²⁸ And this

²⁷ See above at [note 00](#).

²⁸ For accounts of these events, see, for example, Rosamund McKitterick, *The Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians, (751–987)* (London: Longman, 1983), pp. 310–24; Jean Dunbabin,

is where Æthelstan's policy of creating opportunities, when he had at first only used them when they presented themselves, to become ever more closely entwined with Continental politics which involved his kin comes into focus. In addition to giving his half-sister Edith to be married in 929–30 to Otto, the son of the King of Germany, Henry,²⁹ of which more later, Æthelstan was asked for the hand of his sister Eadchild in 926 by Hugh of Neustria, the other great force in the politics of the kingdom together with Heribert of Vermandois and Arnulf of Flanders.³⁰ It is certainly no coincidence that Hugh should have immediately followed suit, only a few years after Charles the Simple had married Eadgifu, and effectively declared his ambition in the direction of the West Frankish throne, admittedly not immediate but in terms of the future of the family, by an alliance with the West Saxon king, and through him also to the Carolingian kin. By the time Edith had married Otto, Æthelstan was further related to the remaining two powerful families in West Francia and Burgundy. Another of his sisters, Ælfgifu (*Adiva* or *Adelana* in Continental Germanic forms), was married to a 'duke near the Alps' or 'king', who has been said to have been either Louis, brother of King Rudolph of Burgundy, or possibly the future Conrad the Pacific, king of Burgundy from 937.³¹ If so, Ælfgifu would have been the mother of Gisela, who married Henry the Wrangler, duke of Bavaria, and, through their son the future Henry II, she would have been the ancestress of the Salian dynasty of German emperors.

France in the Making, 843–1180 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 95–98; and Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages, 800–1056* (London: Longman, 1991), pp. 148–74.

²⁹ See below at [note 00](#).

³⁰ McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 305–39; Dunbabin, *France*, pp. 44–100; and Sharp, 'England, Europe', pp. 206–08; for Hugh's marriage, see *Flodoard* (s.a. 926); Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 200–01.

³¹ Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 200–01; Hrotsvitha's *Gesta Ottonis*, repr. in B. Hill, *Medieval Monarchy in Action: The German Empire from Henry I to Henry IV* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), p. 123. On her name, and marriage, see R. G. Poole, 'The Alpine Son-in-Law of Edward the Elder', in *Studies in Chronology and History*, ed. by A. L. Poole (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 119–120, favouring Conrad, and Karl Leyser, 'Die Ottonen und Wessex' (1983), 73–97 (English translation, 'The Ottonians and Wessex', in Leyser, *CPME*, pp. 73–104 (at pp. 86–87)), who argues for Louis of Burgundy. Cronenwett, 'Basileos Anglorum: A Study of the Life and Reign of King Æthelstan of England, 924–939' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1975), pp. 99–100, argues quite convincingly for the Conrad hypothesis, on grounds of age and geography.

Finally, there may have been a further sister, also called Eadgifu the Younger (or Eadgiva), who was married to a certain 'Duke Louis of the Aquitanians', sometimes identified with Louis the Blind, descendant of Boso and Ermengard, daughter of Louis II, king of Italy and Provence, and a Carolingian emperor deposed in 901, whose first wife was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor and his second that of the King of Burgundy.³² This identification, however, poses chronological problems, and in any case the alliance may seem rather an unlikely one to have been formed, since nothing else was said about it in Continental sources and would no doubt have been more widely recorded had it really existed.³³ There was no 'duke of the Aquitanians' called Louis, but the duchy of Aquitaine itself was essentially made up of Auvergne and Poitou, counties which had their own ruling families of counts. According to which was the most powerful, their members took turns to use the title of 'duke of Aquitaine'. It is therefore possible that the younger Eadgifu married one of the counts of Poitou, for example William, who had become Duke of Aquitaine in 935; thus William of Malmesbury got the title right but the name wrong.³⁴ This possibility is further strengthened by William of Aquitaine's readiness to support, twice, the person who would, had he or his father married Æthelstan's sister, have been his cousin, that is, Louis IV, son of Charles the Simple and Eadgifu.³⁵ The counts of Poitou too were descended from a Carolingian, through an ancestor who had married one of Louis the Pious's daughters. A third possibility has been suggested by Hlawitschka, namely that this sister and the sister discussed in the previous paragraph as having married into the Burgundian family were in fact one and the same, and that the husband was indeed Louis, brother of Rudolph of Burgundy. In Hlawitschka's view, the English writers misread his title 'rex

³² McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms*, p. 356.

³³ Poole, 'Alpine', p. 117 n. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 200–01 and 218–19.

³⁴ Poole's argument relies on an entry by Adhémar de Chabannes in the earlier version of his Chronicle; see *Adémar de Chabannes: Chronique*, ed. by J. Chavanon (Paris: A. Picard, 1897), p. 143, n. 3, though Adela was in the later one the daughter of the Duke of Normandy. If Edgiva and Adela are two different women (as is likely to be the case) then this marriage must have been a first, and short, one for the Count of Poitou. There is as yet no consensus about the two princesses, though Sarah Foot, in this volume, has suggested that they may have been just one person, who married a prince that William of Malmesbury (wrongly) thought to have been Louis of Aquitaine. Once again, it is a matter of deciding whether to trust William's very precise details, or assume that he must have been mistaken on several counts. Cronenwett, 'Basileos Anglorum', pp. 94–95, favours William of Aquitaine.

³⁵ *Flodoard* (s.a. 942 and 951); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 168–9, 214–15, and 288–91.

Alamannorum' as 'rex Aquitaniurum' which they interpreted as 'duke of Aquitaine'.³⁶ No final agreement has been reached on this, though William of Aquitaine and Conrad of Burgundy's involvement as helpers for Louis could be suggestive of especially close family ties such as those of uncle and nephew.

At any rate, by the early 930s Æthelstan was thus related to every major aristocratic family vying for power in West Francia: he was the cousin of Arnulf of Flanders, the brother-in-law of the late Charles the Simple and now uncle to the current Carolingian king Louis IV, brother-in-law to Hugh the Great and possibly to Conrad of Burgundy and to the Duke of Aquitaine. More importantly, through these alliances, he was related in at least six different ways to the Carolingian family, seven if one counts Charles the Simple's daughter's marriage with Rollo of Normandy.³⁷ He could be said to have been closer than men like Heribert of Vermandois, Conrad of Burgundy, William of Aquitaine, or William of Normandy to the heart of the Carolingian family, while men like Hugh the Great or Hugh the Black, duke of Burgundy, had a much more tenuous link with it. Through their marriages to Edith and Eadchild, Otto, future king of Germany, and Hugh the Great, the two major contenders for power within the old Carolingian Empire who had no Carolingian ancestry, acquired such an ancestry, as well as plugging into this Carolingian network of power, including making themselves relatives of Louis IV. Allying themselves with Æthelstan meant all that, as well as becoming associated with the most successful military leader and king of the day, the only one to express in his policies the reality of Carolingian-style emperorship (*imperium*). Above all, for Otto and Hugh, it meant acquiring a brother-in-law, Æthelstan, who was the most powerful ruler in Europe.

Æthelstan, of course, was that, and more besides. He had formidable firepower in the form of an army which had repeatedly defeated the Vikings, and especially

³⁶ E. Hlawitschka, 'Die verwandschaftliche Verbindungen zwischen dem hochburgundischen und der niederburgundischen Könighaus: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Burgunds in der ersten Hälfte des zehnten Jahrhunderts', in *Grundwissenschaften und Geschichte, Festschrift für Peter Acht*, ed. by W. Schlögl and P. Herde, Münchener Historische Studien, abteilung Geschichtliche Hilfswissenschaften, 15 (Kallmünz: Michael Lassleben, 1976), pp. 28–57 (pp. 50–57).

³⁷ On all these marriages, see, for example, V. Ortenberg, 'Aux périphéries du monde carolingien: liens dynastiques et nouvelles fidélités dans le royaume anglo-saxon', in *La Royauté et les élites laïques et ecclésiastiques dans l'Europe carolingienne (du début du IX^e siècle aux environs de 920): Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre d'Histoire de la Région du Nord et de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest*, ed. by Régine Le Jan (Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1998), pp. 505–17 (pp. 505–11); a good set of genealogical tables can be found in McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 354–67, and for England, in Sharp, 'England, Europe', p. 203, fig. 8.

of a fleet whose reputation was well known.³⁸ The reigning family of Wessex had known increasing military success since the 870s and had regained England from the Danes. Even before his victory at 'the great battle', that of *Brunanburh*, Æthelstan's greatness was much admired by foreign kings as well as by his own people; but it was bravery in battle and success in warfare that gained him the reputation for 'implanting the nations around him with dread' and 'instilling terror into all enemies of the fatherland', so much so that he ruled 'by terror of his name alone'. Wessex kings carried an aura of power and success, which made them increasingly powerful in the 920s, while most other Continental houses were in military trouble and engaged in internecine warfare.³⁹ While the civil wars and the Viking attacks on the Continent had spelled out the end of the unity of the Carolingian empire, which had already disintegrated into separate kingdoms, military successes had enabled Æthelstan to triumph at home and to attempt to go beyond the reputation of a great heroic dynasty of warrior kings, in order to develop a Carolingian ideology of kingship. He had learnt early on how to think of kingship in the ideological terms which the early Carolingians had developed and had transmitted to the Wessex kings through Judith and her coronation and through Alfred and his consecration in Rome as a child. Alfred had 'invested' Æthelstan at an early age, and the various ideological supports of this emperorship (*imperium*) claimed by Æthelstan were fully in operation through the creation of a learned court, church reform, accumulation of relics, legislation, administration, and coinage. This was happening even as Continental nostalgia and desire for an imperial revival seemed to have no other possible expression than in the emperorship (*imperium*), the hegemony, of the King of England over all his other subject rulers. Despite the generally accepted non-royal origin of his mother, and his own birth 'not in the purple', he was regarded as not only of a noble and indisputably pure and ancient royal line (*stirps regia*), but he was also increasingly interrelated to the Carolingian family.

Indeed he was clearly treated as the new Charlemagne when Hugh, in the course of his embassy to ask for the hand of Eadchild (led by Æthelstan's cousin Adelf of Boulogne), gave Æthelstan not only fabulous gifts of jewelry but also relics of the Cross and the Crown of Thorns embedded into the sword of Constantine, the banner of St Maurice which Charlemagne was believed to have carried in battle in Spain, and finally and most symbolically, the spear of Charlemagne, said

³⁸ Wood, 'Æthelstan', pp. 133–37 and 140–48.

³⁹ Sharp, 'England, Europe', pp. 197–99.

to have been that of Longinus which pierced the side of Christ on the Cross.⁴⁰ This was an obvious acknowledgment of the status of Æthelstan as more than just the powerful West Saxon king, but as a descendant of the Carolingians and a full member of the Carolingian affinity (*affinitas*). Above all, the nature of these relics shows a perception that there had been a *translatio imperii*, a transmission of Charlemagne's emperorship (*imperium*) and power (*virtus*) to Æthelstan.⁴¹ In the manuscript most closely associated with Æthelstan, the psalter now BL, MS Cotton Galba A XVIII (Figures 28–29), two images are clearly meant to recall at least the main relic given to him by Hugh the Great in the 926 embassy, the lance of Longinus. These two scenes, of Christ holding the Cross with the instruments of His Passion and of Christ showing His wounds, were unusual iconographic representations at the time, and their appearance must certainly be related to the gift of the lance of Longinus.⁴²

Æthelstan used some of the relics in battle against the pagan Danes, just as Charlemagne had done in Spain against the Muslims. He was only too conscious of his kinship with the Carolingians, as well as having learned to use the benefits of Carolingian royal ideology. But this was also a two-way traffic. Thus, for example, a German cleric celebrating Æthelstan's victory in 927 did so by reworking a ninth-century poem celebrating Charlemagne, and Lupus of Ferrières wrote to Æthelstan describing him in terms which could equally have been applied to Charlemagne as 'excelling in fame and honour all earthly kings of modern times' being an 'exaltor of the holy Church and a subduer of enemies'.⁴³

This consciousness of belonging to the Carolingian affinity led Æthelstan to provide help for such members of this kin who asked for it, most famously Louis, who had been brought by his mother, Æthelstan's sister Eadgifu, back to the English Court when her husband, the King of West Francia, Charles the Simple, had been deposed. Louis, the future King Louis IV d'Outremer ('from across the sea'), grew up with Æthelstan and was eventually re-established with his help on the Frankish throne. Among other beneficiaries of Æthelstan's help was Arnulf of Flanders when he had had to remove his enemy Count Herluin of Boulogne and sent his family to Æthelstan's court for safekeeping.⁴⁴ But in the volatile context

⁴⁰ Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 218–21.

⁴¹ Wood, 'The Making', pp. 266–70.

⁴² Wood, 'The Making', pp. 267–68; Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', p. 194 and refs.

⁴³ Wood, 'Æthelstan', p. 137.

⁴⁴ *Flodoard* (s.a. 939); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 124–33 and 146–47; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 30–31.



Figure 28. Last Judgement with Christ holding the instruments of His passion, the cross, spear, and sponge. London, British Library, MS Cotton Galba A XVIII, fol. 2^v.
Reproduced with permission.

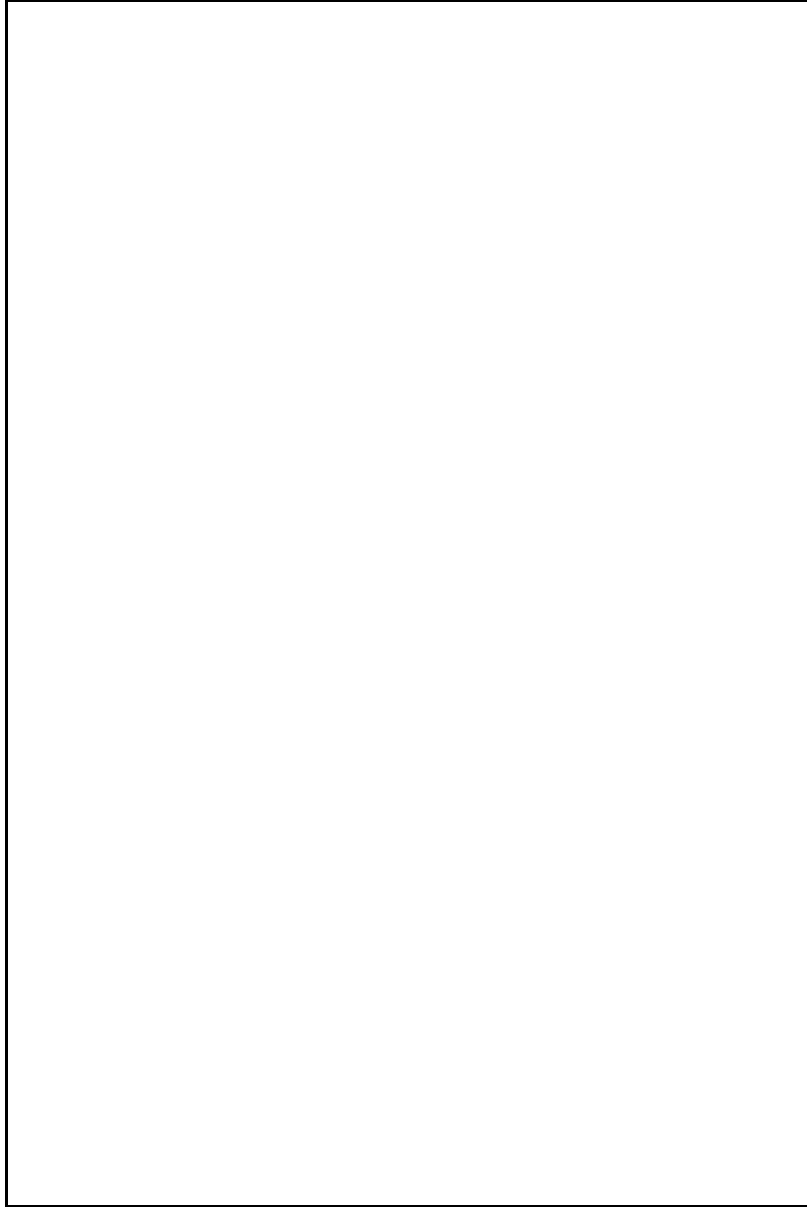


Figure 29. Christ showing his wounds, enthroned with martyrs, confessors, and virgins. London, British Library, MS Cotton Galba A XVIII, fol. 21'.
Reproduced with permission.

of the policies of the 930s, with this kind of background and willingness to involve himself in Continental politics, and with his army and fleet, what was there to say to Frankish princes that Æthelstan, only separated by a small bit of water, would not involve himself even further on the basis of his Carolingian family network and the implicit *translatio imperii*? Magnates like Hugh, Arnulf, Heribert, Hugh the Black, and even William Longsword, who had spent the years since at least 922 fighting each other, might have welcomed not only the return of the legitimate Carolingian Louis IV from England, since none of them would have been strong enough to triumph over the others in the royal stakes and none would have allowed any of the others to seize the crown. But they might also have seen the substitute Carolingian Æthelstan as the best guarantor and arbitrator in the conflicts and, at the very least, they would not have wanted to get on the wrong side of him but rather to keep him neutral.

Æthelstan's direct involvement in West Frankish policies can be said to have begun when his sister Eadgifu and her son Louis returned to Wessex in 923 and remained there until Hugh's embassy (with Æthelstan's Flemish cousin Arnulf, the Count of Flanders this time) in 936 managed, with some difficulty claims Richer, to convince the clearly concerned King that Frankish magnates were indeed asking for his grandson back and that the latter would be safe on his return.⁴⁵ Even then, Æthelstan prudently sent a special messenger to test the waters first and to reassure himself of their good faith, asking for guarantees and an oath of fidelity, probably requesting the princes physically to make an appearance on the French coast to give these, which would have enabled him to intervene militarily very fast to protect Louis should things not have gone according to plan.

They did go to plan, however, at least at first. Louis was crowned, possibly with a coronation *ordo* brought from England, perhaps the one written for the coronation of Edward the Elder's second wife Ælfflæd,⁴⁶ and Louis and his mother took up residence in the only area of the fisc which was still part of the Carolingian possessions, which was around Laon.⁴⁷ But Hugh really wanted Louis back as king only as long as Louis was prepared to follow his advice which was to do what Hugh

⁴⁵ Flodoard (s.a. 936); Richer (Latouche), I, 126–33.

⁴⁶ J. L. Nelson, 'The Second English *Ordo*', in Nelson, *PREME*, p. 367.

⁴⁷ On the events of the 920s and 930s in Francia, see, for example, McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms*, chap. 12; Dunbabin, *France*, pp. 45–58, 63–74, and 89–98; and more specifically for the events of Louis's reign, P. Lauer, *Annales de l'histoire de France à l'époque carolingienne: le règne de Louis IV. d'Outremer*, Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 127 (Paris: Émile Bouillon, 1900), pp. 11–75.

wanted. At first Louis did help Hugh win the upper hand in his fight against Hugh the Black in Burgundy, but soon Louis was becoming too independent and determined to follow his own policies which, understandably, involved keeping together and/or retrieving as much of the Carolingian kingdom as could be preserved, as his father had tried to do. Such policies involved recovering as much of the lost terrain as possible, and Louis focused his efforts on the northern and eastern parts of West Francia, trying to ensure fidelity from his main vassals in Flanders, Normandy, Brittany, and the Paris area, as well as maintaining at least the appearance of control through the confirmation of charters as far as the Spanish March and Aquitaine, and attempting whenever possible to assert his authority over Lotharingia. One such policy, for example, involved making an ally of Hugh the Black, against Hugh the Great's wishes.

Without going into the details of Louis IV's constantly changing alliances and his fighting with his main vassals, detailed by Flodoard and Richer, one can detect, broadly speaking, a pattern of (mostly) support from Hugh the Black in Burgundy, William of Aquitaine, who twice intervened to help Louis in 942 and 951, and Arnulf of Flanders — as opposed to (mostly) opposition from Hugh the Great and Heribert of Vermandois, when they were not at loggerheads with one another and prepared to use Louis as a pawn or hostage. Naturally, the main reason for these alliances was the fact that it was the lands of Hugh the Great and Heribert of Vermandois, and their authority, which Louis needed most to control, as being the heartland of the Carolingian fisc and former power-base, and the two magnates naturally resisted this. Heribert in particular was set on gaining the very heart of the remaining Carolingian power, Laon and the archiepiscopate of Reims. Nevertheless, it is interesting that help for Louis was more likely to come from his cousin Arnulf of Flanders and from his probable cousin William of Aquitaine, as well as from his allies in Burgundy and later in Lotharingia. In Arnulf, moreover, he had not only a cousin but an ally with whom he collaborated on economic grounds, as together they tried to rebuild the ports at Quentovic and Guisnes in 938⁴⁸ to revive trade, though possibly also, for Louis, to keep his English link as active as possible for his own safety. This seems to imply that he already saw the threat posed by his Frankish vassals, and in fostering this link with England, he was considering the possibility that his uncle, King Æthelstan, might be able and willing to send his fleet and maybe even his army to support him in need. Hugh the Great was Louis's uncle by marriage, since his English wife, Eadchild, was the sister of Louis's mother.

⁴⁸ *Flodoard* (s.a. 939); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 140–41; see also Grierson, 'Relations', pp. 79 and 89.

Eadhild, however, died in 937, possibly at the very time when Louis was pushing away Hugh's 'protection' and advice in order to follow his own policies.

It has sometimes been suggested that Hugh the Great may have been 'anti-Carolingian' and that the sending of Charlemagne's relics to Æthelstan, with its implication of a *translatio imperii*, could in fact have been a way of removing the Carolingian mystique away from West Francia.⁴⁹ In view of the way in which Hugh, like Heribert of Vermandois, wanted to buy into the Carolingian prestige, this seems an anachronistic view. No one in the first half of the tenth century was anti-Carolingian since, with the minor accidents of the interruption of the line for military reasons, to all intents and purposes the Carolingians were the one and only royal family of West Francia and would continue to be perceived as such until at least the reign of Louis's son Lothar (954–86). The Vermandois family, descended directly from Charlemagne, and Heribert of Vermandois's grand embassies to Rome, as well as his pressure on Laon and the Carolingian heartland, were meant to bring him ever closer to the throne through an increasing imitation of Carolingian royal behaviour as well as a highlighting of his Carolingian family connections, until ultimately he pushed this so far as to marry in 951 a much older woman, Eadgifu, mother of Louis himself.⁵⁰ It was a way of pursuing the Carolingian kingship even further, since it meant that he had married the Carolingian king's mother. This was a definite blow to Louis, who immediately rejected his mother as queen, notably by removing two of the Carolingian lands traditionally assigned to the queen, the abbey of St Mary of Laon and the fisc at Antony, and giving them to his wife instead.⁵¹

From early on, Louis was increasingly looking towards the eastern lands of Lotharingia. He had been involved in Lotharingian politics, for example in 939 when the four Lotharingian princes, Duke Gislebert, Count Otto of Verdun, Count Isaac of Cambrai, and Count Theuderic of Holland, defected to him after having briefly flirted with Otto I.⁵² After marrying Lotharingia's widowed Duchess Gerberga, who was also Otto I's sister, Louis continued to oscillate between alliances with Otto I when necessary and attempts to recover Lotharingia for the

⁴⁹ Sharp, 'England, Europe', p. 207; also Cronenwett, '*Basileos Anglorum*', p. 82.

⁵⁰ Flodoard, (s.a. 951); Richer (Latouche), I, 104–07; on the politics of the Vermandois, see McKitterick, *Frankish Kingdoms*, pp. 310–13.

⁵¹ Flodoard (s.a. 951); Richer (Latouche), I, 292–93; Lauer, *Annales de l'histoire de France*, p. 220.

⁵² Flodoard (s.a. 939); Richer (Latouche), I, 152–53.

Carolingians whenever this appeared possible. It may be that Louis's change of orientation in his policies of alliance with Otto and the important role taken on by Gerberga were enough to irritate Eadgifu, who saw her daughter-in-law as increasingly dictating her husband's policy in such a way as to turn it away from West Francia. This, in turn, led her, Eadgifu, to attempt to regain power via another Carolingian on the sidelines, if it is correct that she married Heribert of Vermandois for that reason — by then Otto was no longer married to her sister Edith, who had died, and the German kingdom of East Francia was rising fast. Louis was supported in his Lotharingian policies by Æthelstan, who sent a fleet to help him out when he heard that Louis was in difficulties with Otto,⁵³ even though Otto had also been his brother-in-law and his cousin Arnulf of Flanders supported Otto. Despite the fact that his involvement in Continental politics was wide, Æthelstan stuck to his agreement in this instance to support the nephew he had brought up and helped to regain the throne.

Of the famous naval expedition of 939 brief discussion at least is required. Modern interpretations of this, the first ever expedition in European history to have the English fleet cross the Channel to become enmeshed in Continental politics, are completely at variance with each other. The three most common are the following:

- 1) The fleet was powerless, did nothing but pillage the lands of the Count of Flanders and then went home without having achieved its objective (though it is not clear what this was). This is based on Flodoard's account.
- 2) The fleet returned without doing anything because the leaders found out that they had been misinformed and that there was no rebellion with which to deal. This is based on Richer's account.
- 3) The expedition took place just a few months before Æthelstan's death, he did not really direct it, and he was not really involved anyway.

All of these are possible, or none (3 seems the least likely).

One could perhaps suggest another two possibilities. The first is that the presence of the fleet would have been known by Æthelstan to be sufficient as a threat and a deterrent, though possibly it exceeded its brief. The second is that, whilst not planning to involve or attack Arnulf's lands, Æthelstan might have seen this opportunity as one of greater involvement in Continental affairs, though he himself died too soon after for it to have had any effect.

⁵³ *Flodoard* (s.a. 939); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 152–53.

The expedition had the unfortunate result of alienating Arnulf, though he may have already been somewhat annoyed since monks from the monastery of Saint-Bertin in his County of Flanders, refusing the changes brought to their abbey by his delegate, had by then already taken refuge at Bath with Æthelstan's agreement.⁵⁴ But, and this could only confirm to what extent Æthelstan's influence, let alone the threat of his fleet, was considerable by the 940s, once Æthelstan was dead and the much less powerful King Edmund had succeeded him, Hugh the Great no longer saw any reason to cultivate the goodwill of the English king since there was no longer either a threat or any political gain to be had from England.⁵⁵ Hugh needed peace with Otto I of Germany and wanted for himself another upwardly mobile alliance. So, once again, his marriage policy ran parallel with that of the Carolingian king: Louis IV married one of Otto's sisters, Gerberga; Hugh married another sister, Hadwig, after the death of Eadchild.⁵⁶ It was somewhat unfortunate for him, though perhaps not entirely fortuitous, that the Carolingians had the most politically active spouses, Eadgifu and Gerberga, and Hugh apparently less forceful ones like Eadchild and Hadwig. The plan was still to emulate the Carolingians, and none of their rivals had as yet any real prospect of removing them, or perhaps even any desire to effect or support such a removal. Indeed, when Louis received the fidelity of both Hugh the Great and Heribert of Vermandois in 939, then that of William Longsword in 940 and in 942 that of Heribert's son Otto, and peace of sorts was established in the kingdom,⁵⁷ it may have seemed to Hugh that after letting Louis govern by himself at first in the hope of his failing to do so effectively, Louis might be able not only to salvage his kingdom but even to become increasingly successful at recovering his authority. This is probably the reason why, seeing him recover much more than they expected, Hugh and Heribert finally turned against him when they saw how successful he was becoming and, after claiming to be rescuing him as a prisoner from the Duke of Normandy, Hugh made him his own prisoner. Louis's rescue from Hugh's imprisonment through his uncle King Edmund of England and Gerberga's request to her brother Otto to come to her husband's help shows to what extent, after the death of Æthelstan, it was the

⁵⁴ Grierson, 'Relations', pp. 89–90.

⁵⁵ *Richer* (Latouche), I, 207–09, but note Edmund's argument to Hugh that, should Hugh not free Louis, the English will attack him in France and, Edmund claims, he would easily find at least as many allies to support him (Edmund) in France as Hugh might be able to gather among the French magnates, and possibly more.

⁵⁶ *Flodoard* (s.a. 938 and 939); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 156–57.

⁵⁷ *Flodoard* (s.a. 940 and 942); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 168–73.

Liudolfings who had become the main force in Europe. But they, too, had achieved this partly on account of, and through, Æthelstan.

After the death of Arnulf of Bavaria's son Louis the Child without issue in 911, the Carolingian dynasty in East Francia was finished, superseded by Henry I the Fowler, of the dynasty of the dukes of Saxony begun by Duke Liudolf (d. 866), the Liudolfings. Henry could have carried on the usual policy of East Frankish kings of marrying daughters of the aristocracy, as he himself had done when he had married Matilda, daughter of Theudebert of Saxony and allegedly descended from the eighth-century Saxon warrior Widukind.⁵⁸ Karl Leyser has shown to what extent the Liudolfings, the first non-Frankish dynasty to rule in Germany and seen by many as 'arrivistes', was in need of legitimacy,⁵⁹ in the same way as the Carolingians were when unseating the Merovingians. For that reason, Henry wanted a new marriage policy, involving marriage with women of royal blood. As Charles the Simple had experienced, there were no Carolingian women of great note available, and the Liudolfings, for marriage purposes, were the beggars. In addition, by the mid-920s, even Hugh the Great had managed to insert himself into the Carolingian affinity via his Wessex wife, and the German rulers, with their ambitions in the northern and eastern parts of West Francia, would not have enjoyed having a march stolen on them in this way. For them too therefore the best choice of marrying up was to court the family which combined Carolingian affinity with a royal line which was even older and went back to King Oswald, a saint already highly venerated in Germany through the cult brought there by the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon missionaries.⁶⁰ And this was the family of Æthelstan. Such a marriage would be better than Henry's alliance with Matilda, who could only boast descent from Widukind, who had been Charlemagne's enemy. Hence Henry's coup in securing from Æthelstan the hand of one of his sisters, Edith, for his son Otto — not only a bride worthy of a king through what Widukind of Corvey called the 'regal power of her mighty race',⁶¹ but also representing the military prestige of the English king and the idea of Carolingian emperorship which he embodied. This

⁵⁸ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', p. 81 and n. 1.

⁵⁹ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', pp. 75–83; Sharp, 'England, Europe', pp. 209–11.

⁶⁰ P. Clemoes, *The Cult of St Oswald on the Continent*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow: St Paul's Church, 1983) and Dagmar O'Riain-Raedel, 'Edith, Judith, Matilda: The Role of Royal Ladies in the Propagation of the Continental Cult', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. by Claire Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp. 210–29.

⁶¹ *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), p. 54; also Hrotsvitha in *Medieval Monarchy*, ed. by Hill, p. 123.

would allow the Liudolfings to enter into kinship with the whole network of magnates within Europe, most of whom also claimed affinity with the Carolingians.

Why should Æthelstan have condescended to marry his sister 'down' though? To put it mildly, he was no political fool and could see the way the wind was blowing in the growing success of the Liudolfings, and he wanted connections into what looked like being the future reigning family of Germany. He sent Henry and his son Otto two sisters to choose from,⁶² and, through the chosen bride and Æthelstan's frequent later embassies to Germany, Henry and Otto acquired the instruments for developing an ideology of empire based on that of the Carolingians, as Æthelstan himself had done. In the event, Otto chose Edith, the older and, according to our sources, the more beautiful of the two sisters, and probably helped marry off the other, Ælfgifu (*Adiva* or *Adelana* as she was in German sources), to a Burgundian prince present at court, Conrad, who was in the political orbit of the Liudolfings, and who later intervened together with Otto I and King Edmund of England to free Louis IV.⁶³ To make certain that the German king knew who he was dealing with, the bridal embassy led by Abbot Coenwulf toured famous German monasteries, including St Gall and Reichenau, made sure that Æthelstan's name was entered into their confraternity books, his reputation, both military and political, truly broadcast everywhere, and his wealth and prestige demonstrated through gifts of silver and relics.⁶⁴

From Edith Otto gained not only an alliance with a prestigious royal line but also an alliance indirectly with the Carolingians insofar as Æthelstan was perceived as being one of them. He was taught how to govern in the style of Charlemagne, Charles the Bald, Alfred, and Æthelstan. After Edith's death, possibly inspired by her learning, Otto learnt to read.⁶⁵ Edith brought with her prestigious relics, notably those of St Maurice (probably Hugh's gift to Æthelstan), which became the nucleus of the monastery founded by her and Otto at Magdeburg, Edith's *Morgengift*, later to become an archdiocese.⁶⁶ Throughout Edith's lifetime,

⁶² *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), p. 54; Æthelweard, *Chronicle*, p. 2; Malmesbury, *GRA*, pp. 200–01.

⁶³ See above at [note 00](#) and *Flodoard* (s.a. 946); *Richer* (Latouche), I, 214–15.

⁶⁴ *Liber confraternitatum Sancti Galli, Augiensis, Fabariensis*, ed. by Paul Piper, MGH, Nscr. (Berlin: Weidmann, 1884), pp. 136–37.

⁶⁵ *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), p. 96.

⁶⁶ *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), p. 100; *Thietmar* (Warner), pp. 91–92; Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', p. 73 and 84; L. Hibbard Loomis, 'The Holy Relics of Charlemagne and King Æthelstan: The Lances of Longinus and Maurice', *Speculum*, 25 (1950), 437–56 (pp. 440–56). On

embassies between the two countries further contributed to the development of the cult of St Ursula, of great future in Cologne and the German Church,⁶⁷ and to the strengthening of that of Oswald, generally regarded, by Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim for example, as Edith's ancestor. Edith herself was regarded as a saint in some quarters, where she was called St Edith, and miracles were recorded by Thietmar of Merseburg.⁶⁸ Luxurious manuscripts were exchanged as mutual gifts, Otto sending to Æthelstan the one now known as the Lobbes Gospel Book (BL, MS Cotton Tiberius A II), and Æthelstan the so-called Gandersheim Gospels (MS Veste Coburg 1, though this manuscript has a complex history and may have made its way to Germany via Eadgifu and France).⁶⁹ Many people too were travelling between England and Germany, and Edith had brought her chaplains and entourage with her, while in England there was a whole set of German clerics, at Abingdon, Canterbury, the New Minster at Winchester, and around Bishop Theodred of London, who may himself have had German origins.⁷⁰ Not only were these men close to the King (acting as witnesses in charters), great scholars such as Israel or translators of vernacular German texts into English (including the *Heliand*), but both they and the English visitors to German monasteries contributed to the ecclesiastical revival consolidated by Æthelstan.⁷¹ Perhaps even more than the relics which the King is forever associated with, what he so successfully fostered and would be of great importance for the future of Church reform in England was a revival of the interest among, and enthusiasm of, the lay aristocracy for monasticism. Such interest, perhaps additionally fuelled by the visits of English clergy like Coenwald and later Oda of Canterbury (traditionally regarded as the first of the tenth-century monastic reformers), to German monasteries, was particularly significant in relation to aristocratic women. A whole set of grants of land to such

the early history of Magdeburg, see D. Claude, *Geschichte des Erzbistums Magdeburg bis in der 12 Jahrhundert*, 2 vols (Cologne: Böhlau, 1972), I, 17–379.

⁶⁷ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', p. 88; Wilhelm Levison, *Das Werden der Ursula Legende*, Sonderausgabe aus Heft 132 der Bonner Jahrbücher (Cologne: Ahn, 1928), pp. 68–78.

⁶⁸ Hrotsvitha in *Medieval Monarchy*, ed. by Hill, p. 103; *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), p. 99; *Thietmar* (Warner), pp. 90–92.

⁶⁹ Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', pp. 147–53 and 188–93; Wood, 'The Making', pp. 259–72.

⁷⁰ Wood, 'The Making', p. 261; Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 159–60.

⁷¹ Keynes, 'King Æthelstan's Books', pp. 143–201; Wood, 'The Making', pp. 250–72; Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', pp. 85–89; Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 159–67, esp. pp. 165–66; Ortenberg, *ECC*, pp. 55–56, 61–64, 68–70, and 77–94.

women from 939 onwards attests to this growing trend;⁷² put side by side with our knowledge of the considerable role of Ottonian royal women in the success of tenth-century German nunneries,⁷³ we might see this as a trend picked up by Edith and her entourage and transmitted back to England, unless, of course, it was Edith herself who was among the pioneers in the Ottonian royal family, and her prestige contributed to its expansion. The learned court, the ideological and spiritual support of relics, the gifts and display of art, and the new dynastic ecclesiastical centre at Magdeburg were largely Edith's doing, as was probably her first political act, her coronation together with Otto in a ceremony clearly based on the precedent of Æthelwulf and Judith⁷⁴ and of subsequent English coronation ceremonies with anointment in the Carolingian fashion.

While this belongs to the realm of politics, there is no doubt that part of the success of the English influence must have been due to the fact that, according to at least three of the writers who had the most direct knowledge of those years, Otto was actually in love with Edith, his 'beloved wife', that he was devastated by her death, and that he adored their son Liudolf, despite the latter's repeated rebellions, for which he was never really punished with the severity which would have seemed appropriate.⁷⁵ Such comments are unusual enough in early medieval sources for one to take them seriously. Otto's grief at Edith's early death, after which he transferred all his love for her to their son, may have translated itself into Otto's wish to look for another English wife⁷⁶ — this may have been politics too, but at least it shows that the prestige of Æthelstan's dynasty had not disappeared by the middle of the tenth century in Germany, as it probably had done in West Francia. The Ottonians' close relations with King Edgar later in the century confirm this.⁷⁷

Otto may have had other reasons also to value Æthelstan's friendship, if the text known as the *Casus Sancti Galli* is to be believed. According to this, a fleet sent by

⁷² Dumville, 'Between Alfred', pp. 165–66; K. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), pp. 49–73.

⁷³ Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, pp. 63–73.

⁷⁴ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', pp. 81–82.

⁷⁵ Hrotsvitha in *Medieval Monarchy*, ed. by Hill, pp. 129–30, 132–33, and 135–36; *Widukind* (Lohmann-Hirsch), pp. 100, 104 and most of Bk 2; *Thietmar* (Warner), p. 92; see also Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, pp. 9–31.

⁷⁶ 'Vita Dunstani auctore B', in *Dunstan Memorials*, pp. 253–54.

⁷⁷ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. by P. McGurk, R. Darlington, and J. Bray, 2 vols, OMT (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995–98), II, 412–13; Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', pp. 89–97; Ortenberg, *ECC*, pp. 56 and 79–94.

Otto to fight the Vikings in the North Sea was supposed to be joining up with Æthelstan's fleet, ready to help; since it appears that, at the time, Æthelstan was effectively harrying the coast of Scotland fighting the Vikings there in 934, it is possible to imagine that this may have been planned as a joint military operation.⁷⁸

However, the alliance could also have some possible disadvantages. Otto's affection for Liudolf, who was supposed to succeed him, was later tested by his son's rebellions when another boy was born to Otto's second wife Adelheid. If succession issues had led to the English king possibly attempting to help his nephew militarily during these rebellions, as Æthelstan had done with his nephew Louis IV, this would not have seemed an empty threat to Otto. As it happens, Liudolf died and the question of the succession no longer applied: Adelheid's son Otto was secure. It may be of some interest to see that, perhaps as with Eadgifu and Gerberga, mother and daughter-in-law may not have been entirely happy with each other: Matilda may have resented her husband's policy of marrying their son outside the scope of the German aristocracy, to a princess made out to be so much better than herself, and may have withdrawn for this reason when Edith arrived. At any rate, her name does not appear in any documents witnessed by Otto and Edith, but reappears in the witness-list of a charter only three days after Edith's death!⁷⁹ Nevertheless, relations with England remained close even in the second half of the century, at least until the end of Edgar's reign,⁸⁰ and it was only gradually that the memory of them diminished in England, later than in West Francia. Whether this was by design or through genuine oblivion is hard to say: German mentions of the Holy Lance, from the eleventh century onwards for example, refer to it as having been given to the Ottonian king by the King of Burgundy from the monastery of Agaune (there is no mention of Æthelstan at all).⁸¹ By then the omission of an English link may have been deliberate, as the Burgundian connection was seen as increasingly important, and English kings would no longer be as close to their German cousins until the twelfth century.

Æthelstan was indeed, culturally and ideologically, an English Carolingian, if not even an English Charlemagne. He built up a diplomatic network of kinship with Continental rulers which was not to be seen again until the reign of Queen

⁷⁸ Sharp, 'England, Europe', pp. 210–11.

⁷⁹ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', p. 83.

⁸⁰ Leyser, 'Die Ottonen', pp. 89–97; Ortenberg, *ECC*, pp. 56–57, 62–71, 79–94.

⁸¹ On the complexities of the Holy Lance history, see my discussion in Ortenberg, *ECC*, pp. 69–70 and n. 122.

Victoria (1837–1901), and his style of rulership, like that of Alfred, was deeply modelled on and imbued with the spirit of Carolingian ideology. My contention in this paper has been that the association went further than that. Not only was Æthelstan actually perceived in the former Carolingian empire as the only existing ruler in the Carolingian style at that time, a new Charlemagne, but he was felt to be, and he saw himself, as a member of the Carolingian kin, somebody who had political interests on the Continent and in preserving that kin in power. In view of his fearsome reputation as a military leader, not just as the ‘King of the Anglo-Saxons, Emperor of the Northumbrians, ruler of the pagans and guardian of the Britons’,⁸² and especially of his fleet, his Continental interventions may prove to have been only a start, but for his death in 939 — something the likes of which Louis IV or Hugh or Arnulf could not have foreseen. Æthelstan had not gained the English throne by hiding in the background but by a bold move in the face of some strong opposition. He was regarded with awe by his contemporaries and he may well have considered the possibility of acting further as an arbiter of European politics than just helping out refugees — after all, there had been no emperor in the West since the death of Berengar of Friuli in 924, and Otto would not be crowned until 962. In this unusual gap, with no other contender in the 930s, might Æthelstan not have thought about himself becoming emperor? After all, had not the contemporary *Annals of Ulster* (from the other side of his *imperium* this time) proclaimed him the ‘pillar’ or the ‘keystone of the Western world’?⁸³

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⁸² Wood, ‘Æthelstan’, p. 149, or Keynes, ‘King Æthelstan’s Books’, p. 190.

⁸³ *The Annals of Ulster (to AD 1131), Part I: Text and Translation*, ed. by S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 386–87 (an. 939).